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ABSTRACT

Participants in the Dad's Day at the Center for Young Children program meet on Saturday mornings for a series of 12 sessions which combine play and discussion group activities. The first hour of each session is structured so that fathers and their 2-, 3-, and 4-year-old children can spend time together experiencing new toys, foods, arts, and games in individual and planned group activities. During the second hour of the program, aides supervise and lead children's activities while the fathers discuss various aspects of child development and parenting; and share their problems, concerns, and feelings about fatherhood with other men who have a common interest in being actively involved dads. Included in this program description are lists of program goals for fathers and children, an outline of discussion topics fathers selected as beneficial, and a discussion of implications of the program's success for early childhood educators. Resources for program development are pointed out. A 20-item reference list is appended. (RH)

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WHAT ARE MEN AFRAID OF: THE WHYS AND HOWS OF HELPING MEN BECOME ACTIVE CARETAKERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

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Running Head - Father Involvement

INTRODUCTION

Teachers have long realized that parents play a very important role in the lives of young children, and this contention is generally recognized by most professionals working in the field (Papalia & Olds, 1979; Swick & Manning, 1983; Wolfendale, 1983). The ways in which parents raise their children has a profound effect on all aspects of their lives. Although parents do play a powerful role in influencing the development of their children, this influence varies in type and degree from family to family, and also between mothers and fathers. Mothers have long been viewed as the main source of influence on young children (Lamb & Bronson, 1980), and it has only been of recent years that we have come to realize the importance of paternal influences on a child's development. Research into the area of parental influences has shown that fathers have consideralbe impact on their young children (Gilbert, Hanson & Davis, 1982), and that this involvement is, "...neither incidental to him, infrequent, nor without significant psychological consequences for the child" (Feldman, Nash & Aschenbrenner, 1983, p. 1628).

IMPACT OF FATHERING

The research into the areas of paternal influences has shown that men do have a considerable impact on their young children, and that this influence ranges from affecting cognitive and emotional development to sex-role identification and personality development (Gilbert, et al., 1982; Lamb & Bronson, 1980; Russell, 1978; Swick & Manning,

1983). At the same time evidence shows that men are reluctant for the most part to become actively involved in child rearing (Lamb & Bronson, 1980; Levant & Doyle, 1983; McCall, 1985; Radin, 1981). Because of this lack of paternal involvement, differences in child rearing practices between men and women are readily evident. Studies have shown that fathers and mothers interact differently, play differently and even have different sex-role expectations for their children (Gilbert et al., 1982; Honig, 1983; Roopnarine & Mounts, 1985), and these differences have been cited as being factors involved in other problems that can occur as children develop and grow.

Several reasons have been postulated as to why fathers fail to become actively involved in the raising of their young children. Research has found that there is a significant relationship between the attitudes of both mothers and fathers toward parenting and the degree of paternal involvement, or lack thereof (Baruch & Barnett, 1981; Blake & McBride, 1984; Lamb & Bronson, 1980; Levant & Doyle, 1983; Palkovitz, 1984). A lack of recognition of the importance of the roles that fathers play in their children's development, by professionals (educators, doctors, etc.), in parenting manuals, popular magazines, papers, etc. and in parent education courses also contributes to a lack of father involvement in child rearing (Lamb & Bronson, 1980; Levant & Doyle, 1983). A lack of preparation for the role of fathering is also cited as a major contributor to fathers taking a less than active part in the raising of their

children (Briggs & Walters, 1985; Gilpin & Glanville, 1985; Palkovitz, 1984; Price-Bonham & Skeen, 1983).

Because of the relationship between parental attitudes and paternal involvement, along with the lack of recognition of the fathers' role and the lack of preparation of fatherhood, parent education courses geared specifically for fathers should influence the way and the degree in which fathers interact with their children. Although few studies have been done on the benefits of father training and support programs, evidence from research dealing in this area appears to hold promise for such programs (Levant & Doyle, 1983). Possible positive benefits of these programs are evident for both the fathers and their children.

A PROGRAM FOR DADS

The staff at the Center for Young Children (CYC) located in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD recognizes the importance of the roles that parents play in the lives of young children. They are also aware of the impact that fathers can have, either positive or negative, on their children's development. In working with both parents of children enrolled in the CYC programs and with parent education in general, they support the contention that by being actively involved in the raising of their young children, lasting positive benefits can be had for both children and parents. As a member of the CYC staff, this author is also interested in improving the quality of young children's lives through a variety of methods, one of which includes working with parents and parent education, and more

specifically, working with fathers.

As a result of the recent surge in the popularity of the topic of fatherhood, along with the recognition of many of the factors that influence men toward a pattern of non-involvement in child rearing, the "Dad's Day at the CYC" program was created. The rationale/purpose behind this program is two-fold. The first is to provide a parent education/play group program that is specifically geared for men and their preschool age children, and which is aimed at providing the fathers a way to become actively involved with their children in an organized fashion. The second purpose of the Dad's Day program is related to the role the CYC has within the College of Education, that of being a research center that is involved in studying various aspects of child development and early childhood education. The Dad's Day at the CYC program is structured so that various aspects of father-child interactions, along with the fathers' perceptions of the quality and types of relationships they have with their children can be investigated. The goal of the program is to be able to provide what is perceived to be a much needed program for fathers while at the same time trying to add new knowledge to the existing body of literature in the area of paternal influences.

THE "DAD'S DAY AT THE CYC" PROGRAM

The structure of the Dad's Day at the CYC program is based on the Bank Street model (Oppenheim, Stevenson & The Fatherhood Project, 1986) that was developed by James Levine and others as part of Bank Street College's "Fatherhood

Project". In our program fathers and their 2, 3 and 4-year old children meet on Saturday mornings at the CYC for a series of 12 week sessions that are a combination of play group and discussion group times. The first hour of each session is structured so that the fathers and their children can spend time together exploring new toy, food, art and game experiences in individual and planned group activites. These activities encourage the fathers to become actively involved interacting with their children within the context of the "child's" world. This leads to what is commonly referred to as quality time being spent between father and child. During the second hour of the program aides supervise and lead activities with the children while the fathers go to another room for group discussions. This group time provides the men the opportunity to discuss various aspects of child development and parenting, while at the same time giving them the chance to share their problems, concerns, feelings, etc. about fatherhood with other men who have a common interest in being actively involved dads.

There are many goals for the Dad's Day at the CYC program, many of which are related to those developed in the Bank Street model (Oppenheim, Stevenson & The Fatherhood Project, 1986). Some of the goals of the program for the fathers include: 1) strengthening the father-child relationship; 2) learning more about children generally and their own child in particular; 3) joining with other fathers who share their interests and concerns; and 4) finding support and satisfaction in their personal growth and role as

fathers. Some of the goals of the program for the children include: 1) strengthening the father-child relationship; 2) nurturing creative, social, intellectual and physical development through interaction with materials, other children and with their fathers; 3) developing an awareness of self and the environment around them; and 4) having the opportunity to play and enjoy being a child in a fun and nurturing setting.

The routine for the Dad's Day at the CYC program typically follows the schedule below:

9:30 - 10:15	Free Play Together
10:15 - 10:30	Group Activity and Storytime Together
10:30 - 10:40	Children's Snack
10:40 - 11:25	Children - Free Play
	Fathers - Group Discussion
11:25 - 11:30	Closing Activity

FATHER PARTICIPATION

The fathers participating in the Dad's Day at the CYC program do so for a variety of reasons. During the first group session time was spent talking about the reasons why they were there. Some fathers signed up so that they could spend some "special" time with their child. Some felt that their wives were the ones who were always involved with their child, and they felt that they would like to (or should) be doing more with with them. One father even went so far as to say that it was his wife who was more or less forcing him to

attend, although since the program has begun he has grown to be receptive, and even enthusiastic about participation. One common element that arises from the various factors involved in participating on the part of the fathers is their belief that participation in the program will lead to positive benefits for their child as well as their own personal benefit and growth.

In setting up an agenda of topics for discussion during group sessions many areas of concern that the fathers share about parenting came to light. The group discussions are structured so that the fathers can identify topics that they believe would be beneficial to discuss. Some topics brought up for discussion include what is a good father/parent and what are the reasons for becoming a parent, how much pressure or push should be put on children to acquire academic skills at an early age, how do you handle discipline problems with young children in a loving and nurturing way yet still be firm, how do you handle sibling rivalry between young children, and how do you counteract the negative influence of the violent nature of children's cartoon and TV programs. Some other areas brought up for discussion included what are the different ages at which young children should be acquiring various physical and cognitive skills (stages of development), how do you balance the time demands between a job, a spouse and children and still maintain your own sanity, and what are some different types of activities that would allow you to spend quality time with your child. These topics reflect the fathers' concerns about being a good

parent and their desire to do what is in the best interest for their children. They also reflect some of the struggles that the fathers are experiencing as they try to change the patterns of non-involvement in child-rearing that men in general exhibit. Having had no role models to pattern their parenting behaviors after, these fathers go through many stages of trial and error as they work at becoming comfortable with the role of being an actively involved dad.

As fathers have gone through the Dad's Day at the CYC program they have expressed a great deal of satisfaction in being able to participate in such a program which allows them to spend some "special" time with their children while at the same time interact and learn from other men who share their interest in fatherhood. Based on observations of the interactions of the father-child dyads over the course of the 12 week session, and from discussions during the group time, it is evident the fathers have slowly become comfortable with being able to step out of their "adult world" roles and into the "child's" world as they sought out and discovered new and better ways of relating to their children. It has been very satisfying to this author to watch each week as the fathers became more and more involved in relating to their children, and as their own perceived sense of competence in their parenting skills grew. As the data from the research being done with the program comes in and is analyzed, more light should be shed on the ways fathers interact with their young children and some of the problems they face as they do so. Casual observation of the

program at this stage points to positive benefits for both the fathers and their children, and as the program and study continues, further investigations in the areas of father attitudes toward parenting, the influence of such programs on the attitudes and interactions of fathers with their children, the fathers' perception of their parenting skills after going through such a program, along with their spouse's perception of the father's parenting skills, will help in creating a clearer picture for understanding paternal influences on child development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

As mentioned previously, most early childhood teachers recognize the importance of the roles that parents play in the overall development of young children. Parent education has long been an important component of many early childhood settings, yet until very recently most parent education courses have completely ignored fathers (Levant & Doyle, 1983). Briggs & Walters (1985) have found that many fathers lack knowledge about normal child development, and that the emotional needs of their children baffle them. As more and more men are recognizing the importance of becoming actively involved in the raising of their young children, they are realizing how little they know about child rearing and how they have few, if any, support services to turn to as they seek ways to become better prepared for the role of fatherhood. Because of the impact that research has shown that men have on their young children, along with the lack of support services for men in general as they prepare for

fatherhood, those educators involved in early childhood settings should seek out ways to get more fathers actively involved in the lives of their young children.

Getting fathers involved could take on many different forms. It could be something as simple as scheduling parent-teacher conferences during hours when the fathers could attend (something that is not common in all settings). It could include classroom teachers finding different ways for the dads to become involved in the classroom, such as encouraging them to volunteer to share a special skill or craft they have with the class. It could even include special early morning coffee hours where the fathers would come to their children's school on their way to work for group discussions/parent education classes. It could also include starting father education/play group programs such as the Dad's Day at the CYC. Whatever form it takes, early childhood educators should seek out ways to encourage men to become actively involved fathers. The literature looking into the areas of paternal influences, along with the data and observations coming from the Dad's Day at the CYC program points to positive benefits for both fathers and their children. The creation of such programs has proven to be a valuable way to help parents and educators in improving the lives of all concerned.

Creating a program for fathers such as the Dad's Day at the CYC is not an easy task. A major obstacle in starting a program would be finding a time slot that would encourage the greatest amount of participation among the men. Although

fathers are beginning to express interest in such programs, getting them to commit their Saturday mornings for a span of 10 to 12 weeks can be problematic. Finding a leader for a fathers' program is also difficult. Ideally the leader would be a father/male so that the men would be able to identify with him and not feel threatened like they would would with a female as they open up about their problems, frustrations, etc. in parenting. There are many other problems that are encountered when trying to start a parent education/play group for fathers and their children, but two very valuable resources are available to help administrators and teachers in starting such a program. The first, How to Start a Father-Child Group (Oppenheim, Stevenson & The Fatherhood Project, 1986) is an informative booklet that gives some helpful guidelines in creating a program for dads and covers all aspects of a program from deciding on reasons why to start a fathers' group to a listing of possible topics for group discussions. This booklet gives all of the nuts and bolts details that are necessary to know in order to set-up a successful fathers' program. The second, Fatherhood U.S.A (Klinman, Kohl & The Fatherhood Project, 1984) is a reference book that has listings of programs, services and resources for and about fathers across the country. This book can give leaders of fathers' groups a ready set of resources of other programs and services around the country where they can turn to share ideas, plan programs, seek help, and generate new ideas in working with similar sets of issues in parenting and fathering.

CONCLUSIONS

The Dad's Day at the CYC program has proven to be a success, if for no other reason than the fathers and their children enjoy it. It is also successful in that it is generating a rich base of data for investigating various aspects of father-child interaction, along with looking at factors that influence the fathers' perceived sense of competence in parenting skills. The factor that makes the program most successful though is the way in which there are positive benefits for both the fathers and the children. Programs like this can improve the quality of a young child's life and aid in their overall development, and therefore should be another possible program emphasis as early childhood educators seek out ways to create the best possible environment for young children.

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